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021831Z Nov 04

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 013168

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/28/2014

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SUBJECT: PEACE AND PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: A VIEW FROM THE DEMOCRATIC LEFT

REF: BOGOTA 12860

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood, Reasons: 1.5 B & D.

¶1. (C) Summary: Leftist Senator Carlos Gaviria -- a self-declared presidential candidate in 2006 -- told poloffs to expect lawsuits against the recently approved constitutional amendment authorizing presidential reelection and expressed concerns about a possible clash between high courts over the issue. He lamented the democratic left's inability to coalesce around a single candidate capable of challenging Uribe and suggested that former President Gaviria could shift the official Liberal Party to the right in alliance with Uribe. He blamed the internal armed conflict on inequality of wealth and opportunity and complained that the security forces do not set a high enough human rights standard. He will be an articulate presidential candidate, but his chances are poor. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On December 17, poloffs met with Senator Carlos Gaviria Diaz, former Constitutional Court Magistrate, current head of the center-left Democratic Alternative movement, and self-proclaimed 2006 presidential candidate. In discussing Congress's recent passage of Constitutional reform legislation authorizing presidential reelection, Gaviria noted that any person can file suit ("demanda") against the legislation and said it is reasonable to expect a number of such suits in the near future. He also expressed concern about a potential clash between two of the country's high courts -- the Constitutional Court and Council of State -- over the issue. Gaviria acknowledged that President Uribe's popularity would be among the factors influencing the Constitutional Court's ultimate decision, but asserted that polls exaggerate the President's popularity.

¶3. (SBU) Gaviria said it would be difficult for Colombia's democratic left to coalesce around a single presidential candidate, despite general agreement among leftist parties on a basic platform. One factor is the continued high level of support for Uribe among the general public. Another is that Bogota Mayor Luis Eduardo "Lucho" Garzon -- the left's most charismatic candidate, who has publicly declared he will not run for president in 2006 -- has concentrated on municipal administration and pulled away from purely political debate and infighting. (Note: Per reftel, the reelection law would permit Garzon to run if he resigns as mayor one year prior to the presidential election scheduled for May 2006. End Note.) According to Gaviria, Garzon has distanced himself from the Independent Democratic Pole party ("Polo Democratico Independiente," or PDI) in recent months. PDI leaders Antonio Navarro and Samuel Moreno both have presidential aspirations, but neither is competitive in public opinion polls at this time.

¶4. (SBU) Regarding the struggling official Liberal Party, Gaviria predicted former Colombian President and OAS Secretary General Cesar Gaviria may seek to take control of

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the party and lead it in a so-called "neoliberal" direction. To do so, however, the former President would have to overcome opposition from the party's vocal social democratic wing. Gaviria said the former President might also move the party toward open support for Uribe's reelection. However, the "horse trading" to get Liberal Party support could strain the Conservative Party's support for Uribe. Some conservatives, while loyal to Uribe as a party, perceive that Uribe has taken them for granted and would probably resent any concessions Uribe might make to gain the support of his former party's official structure.

¶5. (SBU) For Gaviria, former President Andres Pastrana's failed appeasement policy with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) was politically motivated and poorly negotiated, failing to exhaust the possibilities for a negotiated settlement. Uribe's Democratic Security Policy correctly focuses on achieving public order through expanded state control, but has lost legitimacy because the security forces have not maintained standards sufficiently superior to those of the illegal armed groups they are trying to subdue. Gaviria offered frequent cases of mass detentions as an example of the state's failure to live up to its obligations.

16. (C) Comment: Gaviria is one of the loudest voices of the center-left. He was realistic about his slim prospects in the presidential campaign, continually pointing to Uribe's approval numbers and the lack of coordinated center-left opposition.

WOOD